

ture that North Carolina fell behind her sister, and the incubus of this lost time hangs like lead to this day upon the wheels of her progress. These golden hours through which we slept have revenged themselves upon us by a plentiful harvest of regrets. About 1835 the people began slowly to awake to their duty. A system of common schools was soon thereafter inaugurated. It was defective in a high degree, and insufficiently endowed, but still it was a beginning of better things. From year to year it was improved, and its friends were increased until it began to assume very respectable and useful proportions. It was constantly growing in favor, and bade fair to answer the highest expectations of the patriotic, when it was swallowed up in the general ruin of the civil war. Since that time the world knows what chance we have had, or any other reconstructed State has had, to do anything for the lasting good of the people.

One great cause of the backwardness of the southern States on this subject is to be found in the situation of our population. Our people are widely scattered over large areas of territory, and the maintenance of schools is much more costly and difficult than in thickly settled communities. Dense populations are as highly favorable to cheap education as to all other social enterprises. It is quite common to find men moving into the towns, or from one neighborhood into another—often leaving fine plantations and sacrificing money interests—simply to get their children within reach of schools, their neighbors being so few that schools could not be maintained at home. In the aggregation of large bodies of men and women the very attrition in itself constitutes education for the masses. In addition to these disadvantages under which our fathers labored, they were perhaps the most sensitive people on the continent in regard to taxation.

In the earlier days of our history the most rigid economy was taught and practiced in every department of the Govern-